

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (Previously Presented) A method for selectively controlling access to programs, comprising:
 setting a rating limit corresponding to a first user input;
 setting an exception to said rating limit corresponding to a second user input;
 receiving information for identifying a program and for specifying a rating of said program;
 comparing said rating of said program with said stored rating limit;
 determining whether an exception to said rating limit has been set for said program identified by said received program identifying information; and
 controlling access to said program in response to the results of the steps of comparing and determining, wherein said exceptions from said rating limits define programs which shall be blocked or enabled independently to said set rating limits.

2. (Previously Presented) The method in accordance with claim 1, wherein said information for specifying at least one rating of a program and for identifying said program is received together with said program.

3. (Previously Presented) The method in accordance with claim 1, wherein said programs are television programs and wherein said rating limits are used in a parental control system.

4. (Previously Presented) The method in accordance with claim 2, wherein said television programs are received as an analogue television signal and said ratings are received embedded in the vertical blanking interval of said analogue television signal.

5. (Previously Presented) The method in accordance with claim 3, wherein the ratings define the age of the viewer the program is designed for, the degree of a certain program content, or a combination thereof.

7. (Previously Presented) The method in accordance with claim 6 1, wherein a never block program list specifies certain programs that should never be blocked, even if these programs exceed the rating limits.

8. (Previously Presented) The method in accordance with claim 6 1, wherein an always block program list specifies certain programs that should always be blocked, even if these programs do not exceed the rating limits.

9. (Previously Presented) The method in accordance with claim 6 1, wherein said exceptions are specified by metadata describing said programs like the program title, actor name, director name or topic.

10. (Previously Presented) The method in accordance with claim 9, wherein said metadata specifying said exceptions are selected by the user from a dedicated list of metadata.

11. (Previously Presented) The method in accordance with claim 9, wherein program titles specifying said exceptions are selected by the user from a displayed EPG program schedule.

12. (Previously Presented) The method in accordance with claim 9, wherein said metadata specifying said exceptions are selected by marking a currently displayed program.

13. (Previously Presented) The method in accordance with claim 12, wherein the program title of the currently displayed program is stored as exception from said rating limits.

14. (Previously Presented) The method in accordance with claim 12, wherein an overview of metadata describing the currently displayed program is displayed to the user and wherein one or more of said metadata are selected by the user and stored as exceptions from said rating limits.

15. (Previously Presented) The method in accordance with claim 6 1, wherein a set exception is valid for any following episode of a program series.

16. (Previously Presented) A method for selectively controlling the viewing of television programs, comprising:

- setting rating limits in a parental control system for television programs corresponding to first user inputs, wherein said rating limits generally define whether television programs are to be blocked or are enabled for viewing;

- setting exceptions from said rating limits for certain television programs corresponding to second user inputs;

- storing said rating limits and exceptions from said rating limits for certain television programs;

- receiving television programs with embedded information for specifying recommended ratings and for identifying said television program;

- extracting said embedded information;

- comparing said recommended ratings with said stored rating limits;

- checking with said information for identifying said television program whether an exception from said rating limits for certain television programs has been set;

- blocking the viewing of a specific television program either if said rating limits indicate that said specific television program is to be blocked and no exception from said rating limits for said specific television program is set or if said exception from said rating limits indicate that said specific television program is to be blocked; and

- enabling the viewing of a television program either if said rating limits indicate that said specific television program is not to be blocked and no exception

from said rating limits for said specific television program is set or if said exception from said rating limits indicate that said specific television program is not to be blocked, wherein said exceptions from said rating limits define programs which shall be blocked or enabled independently to said set rating limits.

17. (Previously Presented) Apparatus for selectively controlling access to programs, comprising:

means for setting a rating limit corresponding to a first user input;

means for setting an exception to said rating limit corresponding to a second user input;

means for receiving information for identifying a program and for specifying a rating of said program;

means for comparing said rating of said program with said stored rating limit;

means for determining whether an exception to said rating limit has been set for said program identified by said received program identifying information; and

means for controlling access to said program in response to the results of the steps of comparing and determining, wherein said exceptions from said rating limits define programs which shall be blocked or enabled independently to said set rating limits.